

Reclamation Tools for Restoring Healthy Sagebrush Ecosystems

This pamphlet provides northeast Wyoming landowners with voluntary opportunities for restoration of important wildlife habitats with an emphasis on de-commissioned coalbed natural gas fields and sage-grouse. We hope to provide your local conservation district with funding sources and technical assistance for a community-based approach to restoration that goes above and beyond regulatory or industry requirements with little or no cost to landowners. Healthy rangelands and a first class restoration effort will perpetuate sage-grouse populations while helping to sustain livestock operations. If you would like to learn more about these opportunities, contact your local conservation district agent, Natural Resource Conservation Staff (NRCS) staff, or other contacts listed at the back.



Photo courtesy of NRCS

The following voluntary actions with primary contacts are listed in a priority order:

1. **Remove overhead power lines and poles and replace the power source with solar (reduces raptor perches by removing vertical structures).** PRECorp assesses a surcharge Fund at installation which is to be used for removing overhead power lines and poles dedicated to coal bed natural gas. Contact: Tracy Jones, PRECorp.
2. **Remove oil/gas access roads, structures, well pads, and other oil/gas above-ground infrastructure (minimizes fragmentation/disturbances and reduces predator, such as skunk and raccoon, habitat).** Contact: Casey Freise, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), for federal minerals; Janie Nelson, Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (WYOGCC), for fee and state minerals.
 - Federal Minerals: BLM is required to approve a reclamation plan for all oil and gas wells, facilities, and infrastructure including impoundments. The plan must meet the BLM Reclamation Policy and



conditions of approval for the drilling permit(s). For performance bond release approval, a final abandonment notice (with a surface owner release letter on split-estate) must be submitted prior to a final abandonment evaluation by BLM.

- Fee/State Minerals: Site reclamation, in accordance with the landowner's reasonable requests and resembling the original vegetation and contour of adjoining lands, must be initiated within one (1) year of permanent abandonment of a well, or last use of a pit, and completed in a timely manner.



3. **Control annual brome grasses and other noxious vegetation (habitat restoration).** Operator's integrated weed management plan will only treat the direct energy footprint, which is most likely insufficient to control annual brome grasses. Further control can be achieved through cooperation with NRCS and County Weed and Pest Control Districts (note – annual brome grasses are not listed as invasive or noxious in Johnson, Sheridan, Crook, and Converse counties. Cheatgrass is listed, however, in Weston and Natrona Counties). Contact: County Weed and Pest; local NRCS staff.

4. **Improve sustainability of the range resource (increase vigor and production of desirable plant species and adequate plant and litter cover to capture and conserve precipitation).** Implement a grazing management strategy that allows for sustainable range health. Contact: local NRCS staff, BLM, or Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD).
5. **Modify, treat or eliminate water retention structures that provide habitat for vectors of West Nile Virus.** Federally permitted impoundments will be removed and reclaimed unless there is a demonstrated beneficial use. Remaining impoundments should be treated for West Nile Virus. Contact: Kathy Brus, BLM, for impoundments over federal minerals; Wyoming State Engineers Office for impoundments over fee or state minerals.
6. **Improve residual grass cover in sage-grouse nesting habitat to maximize nest success.** Implement a grazing management strategy that allows for sustainable range health and increased residual cover for nesting on a minimum of 20 percent, or 1000 acres, whichever is greater, of the operation's nesting habitat. Stocking rates on remainder of grazing units follow recommended NRCS stocking rates. Contact: local NRCS staff; Janelle Gonzales, BLM.
7. **Restore dewatered mesic areas (seeps, springs, swales, wet meadows) to provide abundant succulent forbs for sage-grouse broods.** Remove trees (salt cedar, Russian olive, cedar) from drainages and develop spring, pipeline, channel and grade stabilization. Retrofit developed springs to provide wet seeps when tanks are full or not in use, restore degraded draws to pre-altered conditions to mimic historic soil moisture conditions, and protect springheads. Contact: local NRCS staff.



8. **Restore sagebrush habitats where disturbances lack adjacent seed sources and sagebrush resources are inadequate.** Use a range management enhancement practice that will increase native vegetation outside sagebrush areas (active restoration of go-back lands and recent cultivations, as well as other soil disturbances). These areas are generally dominated by club moss and/or blue grama. Contact: local NRCS staff; Cheryl Mandich or Janelle Gonzales, BLM.



9. **Retrofit stock water tanks with escape ramps (saves wildlife by providing an escape and keeps water clean).** Contact: local NRCS and Conservation District staff; Cheryl Mandich, BLM.

10. **Remove, modify, or mark fences within 0.6 miles of a sage-grouse lek, those passing through important winter habitat, or where sage-grouse collisions have been documented.** Contact: local NRCS staff; Cheryl Mandich, BLM.

11. **Remove invasive trees and shrubs (junipers, conifers, Russian olive, salt cedar) and those encroaching into sagebrush grasslands or sage-grouse late brood rearing (riparian) habitats.** Native cottonwoods or willows will not be removed from riparian sites. Contact: Bert Jellison, WGFD; local NRCS staff.

12. **Remove junk piles, livestock dead piles, garbage pits, or other predator habitat/attractants within or near sage-grouse habitats (reduces predator habitat).** Contact: Bert Jellison, WGFD; local NRCS staff. Contact: Bert Jellison, WGFD.

13. **Restore sagebrush habitats where disturbances are long and linear and adequate sagebrush exists in the landscape to provide a seed source for establishment (passive habitat restoration).** Contact: Cheryl Mandich, BLM; local NRCS staff.



Applicable NRCS Conservation Programs

- EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program
- WHIP– Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program
- SGI– Sage-grouse Initiative (special allocation of EQIP/WHIP money)

NRCS Local Conservationist Contact List

- Campbell County – Tim Kellogg 307-682-8843
- Converse County – Tim Schroeder 307-358-3050
- Crook County – Keela Deaton 307-283-2870
- Johnson County – Allison McKenzie 307-684-2526
- Sheridan County – Andrew Cassidy 307-672-5820
- Weston County – Aaron Shelton 307-746-3264
- NRCS statewide sage-grouse coordinator – Brian Jensen 307-233-6740

Conservation Districts

- Campbell County – Michelle Cook 307-682-1824
- Converse County – Michelle Huntington 307-358-3050, ext. 109
- Crook County – Sandra Walker 307-283-2501
- Lake DeSmet – Nikki Lohse 307-684-2526, ext. 3
- Powder River – Anita Bartlett 307-738-2321
- Sheridan County – Carrie Rogaczewski 307-672-5820, ext. 3
- Weston County – Jennifer Hinkhouse 307-746-3264
- Natrona County – Lisa Ogden/Brian Connley 307-261-5436

County Weed and Pest

- Campbell – Quade Schmelzle 307-682-4369
- Converse – Cheryl Schwartzkoph 307-358-2775
- Crook – Bob Gilbert 307-283-2375
- Johnson – Rodney Litzel 307-684-5715
- Natrona – 307-472-5559
- Sheridan – Bob Jenn 307-672-3740
- Weston – Hale Redding 307-746-4555

Powder River Energy Corp (PRECorp) – Tracey Jones 307-283-4950

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) – Cheryl Mandich, Bill Ostheimer, Casey Freise, Janelle Gonzales, or Kathy Brus 307-684-1100

University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service 307-766-5124

University of Wyoming Reclamation and Restoration Center 307-766-2179

For all bullets, funding sources include state, federal and non-government organizations. See “Funding Opportunities for Wyoming Sage-grouse Conservation Efforts” at: http://gf.state.wy.us/wildlife/wildlife_management/sagegrouse/index.asp

BLM = Bureau of Land Management

NRCS = Natural Resources Conservation Service

WGFD = Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Sheridan 307-672-7418

WSEO = Wyoming State Engineer’s Office 307-777-6150

WYOGCC = Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission 307-234-7147

